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Viewing cable 09ATHENS1121, Presidential Delegate, Rep. Titus, Discusses VWP, Greece's

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09ATHENS1121	2009-07-01 14:16	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

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SUBJECT: Presidential Delegate, Rep. Titus, Discusses VWP, Greece's Economy and Turkey

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador, State, US Embassy Athens; REASON: 1.4(B)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Head of the Presidential Delegation to the opening of the New Acropolis Museum, Representative Dina Titus, visited Athens June 20-21, meeting with PM Karamanlis, FM

Bakoyiannis, Interior Minister Pavlopoulos, Tourism Minister Markopoulos, Cypriot President Christofias, and President of the Pan Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) George Papandreou. Conversations focused on the upcoming OSCE Ministerial on European Security, Greece-Turkey relations and Aegean/migration issues, Cyprus, and Greece's economic challenges. END SUMMARY.

Karamanlis and Bakoyiannis:

12. (SBU) Nevada Congressional Representative Costandina "Dina" Titus led a Presidential Delegation to participate in the opening of the new Acropolis Museum in Athens, the most significant cultural event in Greece since the 2004 Athens Olympics. During her stay, Rep. Titus met with a broad array of Greek and foreign political figures, from the Prime Minister down. In her meeting with PM Karamanlis and FM Bakoyiannis, Rep. Titus thanked the Prime Minister for hosting the Acropolis event and noted that in the most recent elections to US Congress a number of new Greek-Americans had been elected. Karamanlis welcomed Rep. Titus, appreciating the fact that President Obama had sent a personal representative to the event, and noted that one of the most important issues confronting US-Greek relations today was the Visa Waiver program. He hoped to get the final tasks accomplished soon. On the Corfu talks, Karamanlis said he expected good USG participation, having noted a new "tone" in Washington, with a strong emphasis on diplomacy. Karamanlis commented that he looked forward very much to visiting Washington.

3.(C) In response to a question, Karamanlis said he had just spoken with his Turkish counterpart PM Erdogan, and accepted "my friend's" explanation that his health prevented him at the last minute from coming to Athens for the Acropolis Museum opening. Karamanlis noted that Erdogan had said he would try to visit Athens soon. On Cyprus, Karamanlis expressed his disappointment at the lack of good progress in the UN-mediated reunification talks. He had hoped for more, but feared that the Turkish Cypriots were not being given a free hand from Ankara. Turning to Greece's efforts to improve their relationship with Turkey, Karamanlis said the GOG had worked hard for a long time to smooth the path to a better relationship, but that progress had stalled in recent years. The Turkish military over flights of Greek territory had been getting worse, he said, noting that just the day before PM Erdogan was to come to Greece, several Turkish planes had flown once again over the Greek-inhabited island of Agathonisi. This raised questions about how much Erdogan was in charge. The GOG was trying to figure out if these flights were a political signal or a sign of lack of civilian control over the Turkish military.

14. (C) Rep. Titus asked whether Karamanlis had made progress in his recent discussions at the EU of the migration challenge. Karamanlis said the GOG had tried to work with Turkey on readmission, but he Turks only accepted a very small proportion of the migrants originating from Turkey, so he had gone to the EU Council to seek help. His EU counterparts had promised assistance, including some resources, but he was waiting to see if it would be actually delivered.

Interior Minister Pavlopoulos:

15. (C) Migration issues were picked up in the meeting with the Interior Minister as well. Pavlopoulos was happy with the PM's meeting on migration in Brussels the prior day, saying it was the first time the EU had seriously addressed Greece's immigration problems, although he noted that the EU still need US support. Pavlopoulos said Greece and the EU have not been successful in obtaining re-admission agreements from source countries- noting Nigeria and Pakistan as problems. In response to Ambassador's question, Pavlopoulos indicated the GoG welcomed the upcoming visit of EC Commission President Barosso, which will take place in the context of looking at Greece's immigration crisis. On the domestic side, the GoG will try to move quickly to accommodate Greece's settled Muslim population - including by finally moving to build an official mosque and develop a cemetery.

16. (C) Turning to Greece's internal security challenges, Pavlopoulos said his ministry had worked hard since the anarchist riots in December to stabilize the situation, and get better training for police. The resurgent, though still small scale

domestic terror groups, he said, benefited from modern communications technologies. He also indicated that they were tied in some way to organized crime groups. The GoG was trying to fight both phenomena, and had good information technologies, including public cameras from the 2004 Olympics. However Greece also had some of Europe's strongest personal data privacy laws, a legacy of the 1970's Junta years. Recently, Personal Data Protection Authority staff had been working with police and prosecutors to determine which images from public cameras could be used in prosecutions.

Tourism Minister Markopoulos:

17. (SBU) Minister Markopoulos was confident that Greece would not suffer the severe drops in tourism receipts that some had predicted. In his view, Greece would, be "comfortable" throughout 2009, in part because internal tourism by Greeks was at an historically high level. Markopoulos said his ministry had been working to attract more US tourists, and had organized two trade shows, in Chicago and New York. He would follow this with a visit to Los Angeles to develop more interest in Greece-based productions among U.S. film companies, saying he'd like to see "one Mama Mia (production) per year."

18. (C) Markopoulos turned to the visa waiver issue - saying he was confident that the Greek public would fully support the legal and security arrangements needed to qualify for the visa waiver program with the US. He assured Rep. Titus that "you have nothing to fear from Greek travelers."

Cypriot President Chrystofias

19. (C) President Chrystofias offered a 45-minute review of the history of the conflict (comment: remarkable for its frankness on Greek, and Greek Cypriot historical culpability for many of the problems that they face now), the state of play in his reunification discussions with Turkish Cypriot leader Talat, what he wanted from the USG and Greece, and his views on Turkey's role. Highlights included:

-- He looked forward to an invitation to go to Washington to meet with President Obama .

-- He was in Athens to celebrate the common culture of Greece and Cyprus, but wondered when Cyprus would be able to restore its own heritage. There has been lots of destruction of the Byzantine heritage since 1974.

-- He has a good personal relationship with Talat, but Talat seemed to have changed: "to a certain extent I don't understand him any more. When we try to flesh out details, I get the sense he gets his guidance from Ankara."

-- He was facing tough negotiations and "maximalist positions" but he had trust in Talat, and hoped to see changes in TC positions in coming months.

-- He has made a great concession by discussion of a federal state, but Turkey is pushing for a confederal state. "Bi-zonal, bi-communal is unfair - Cyprus always had a mixed population." A confederal state won't be accepted, and he had no interest in another failure.

-- Turkey must recognize that things have changed: Cyprus is an EU Member, Turkey's EU accession offers new opportunities for all. Turkey confronts the deep state but he hopes Erdogan has the will to permit the necessary compromises.

-- Cyprus has "perfect" relations with Greece - the latter does not interfere in Cypriot affairs. The GOG and USA can help by using their influence with Turkey, and hewing to principles of fairness expressed in various UNSCRs. Greece's position on giving up Treaty Guarantees is helpful; as an EU member state Cyprus has no need of a "mother state" offering guarantees.

PASOK President George Papandreou

110. (C) Opposition PASOK party President George Papandreou focused on Greece-Turkey relations, emphasizing that that he hoped

for Turkey to develop more robust respect for the rule of law, which would help the two countries to live together. This is one reason he supported Turkey's EU accession. Turkey had been questioning Greek sovereignty of various Aegean islets, and was staking a claim to a broad continental shelf, but Greece could not barter on those issues - rather he preferred to work it out through a rules based approach, such as at the International Court of Justice. Papandreou lamented that Turkey's EU prospects seemed to have dimmed in recent years, both because certain EU powers had balked at digesting such a large enlargement candidate and because Ankara had not "decisively" implemented reforms. Papandreou concluded by recalling his close collaboration, focused on Middle East issues, with former Turkish FM Cem, and noting that Greece and

Turkey, working together, would be an important force for stability.
SPECKHARD